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SUBJECT: DETERIORATING STANDARDS 40 YEARS AFTER SOUTH YEMEN
INDEPENDENCE

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[B.](#) SANAA 1831
[C.](#) SANAA 1910
[D.](#) SANAA 1856

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen A. Seche for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1.](#) (C) Summary: Yemen will celebrate the 40th anniversary of Britain's departure from South Arabia on November 30, before a backdrop of increasing protests and violence in the South over perceived injustices and unequal distribution of wealth.

This cable presents a comparison of educational opportunities, economic opportunities, social freedoms and security between the three eras in the history of southern Yemen: the British era, the Socialist era, and the present day. End Summary.

[2.](#) (U) November 30, 2007 will mark the 40th anniversary of the British departure from the part of Yemen which was formerly South Arabia. British South Arabia consisted of the modern governorates of Mahara, Hadramaut, Shabwa, Abyan, Lahj and Aden, which became the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. Since May 2007, post has been watching the development of protests in south Yemen over discontent with the ROYG's handling of development and apportionment of resources and social services. While protests initially focused on a group of disgruntled retired military and civil service officers, they were quickly joined by people unhappy with rising costs, land appropriation, and perceived injustices and opposition party leadership. On the 40th anniversary of Independence, it is a fitting time to revisit South Arabia and see if things are, in perspective, better or worse.

[3.](#) (C) Saadaldeen Talib, a native of Hadramaut and a member of the Supreme National Anti-Corruption Commission (SNACC), told PolOff an anecdote about a Hadrami perspective on the present Yemeni government. (Note: Hadrami is the adjective form of Hadramaut. Governors in Yemen are appointed by the President and are not democratically elected. End Note.) The ROYG governor of Hadramaut was complaining one day to one of his constituents that the Hadramis were always critical and mean to him. The constituent replied, "Once we had sultans in Hadramaut and we criticized them and said terrible things about them. Then the British came, and we criticized them and said how much better the sultans were, and how much we liked the sultans. In time the British left. Then came the socialists. We criticized the socialists, and said terrible things about them, and said how much better the British were and how much more we liked them. Now we have you, governor. If you would only please leave we will like you much more."

Educational Opportunities

[4.](#) (U) Access to social services in British South Arabia before independence was varied. Despite the British attempt to create a federation of southern Arabian states, access to educational institutions in Aden, which had long been a crown

colony, far exceeded that in the many sultanates and emirates that Britain had administered as protectorates. In the western states there were two schools with modern syllabi and 12 in eastern states. Government publications reported some progress introducing the three "Rs" into religious schools. Education in Aden was compulsory and according to official publications there was a place for every child to attend a government primary or intermediary school. There were three secondary schools in Aden, one each for boys, girls and coed.

In addition there were three British government service schools, a Roman Catholic, a Danish, an Indian, and a Jewish school. Institutions of higher learning included Aden College, two teacher training institutes, a women's college, and a technical institute. Additionally, students who qualified had access to further educational opportunities and scholarships in India and the UK.

15. (C) After independence, the Socialist government which eventually took over southern Yemen instituted well supported campaigns against illiteracy. Education was compulsory and free for children, and the government tasked neighborhood Social Committees with ensuring families complied. Elham Abdul-Wahab, General Director of the Supreme Commission on Elections and Referenda, a woman and an Adeni, said that education was free and uniforms, books and other items were heavily subsidized. As an added incentive, women who successfully completed their education were guaranteed jobs, encouraging families to send girls to school. Even in remote desert, tribal and rural areas schools were established and education was imposed on the population.

16. (C) In southern Yemen today there is a wide-spread government school program, which provides education at the primary and secondary level. Government schools are available to students, but are not compulsory. Furthermore,

widespread corruption and demand for bribes by teachers and administrators puts many schools beyond of the income of many families. (Note: Per capita income in Yemen is roughly two dollars or four hundred riyals a day. End Note.) Elham Abdul-Wahab related the tale of her niece, presently enrolled in a government school in Aden. After a speech by the Director of the school, the principal requested fifty Yemeni riyals from each student to buy a present for the Director. Requests for money from students are a regular occurrence, and can range from fifty as in the example above to a few hundred. With little prospects for employment and the hidden costs of education, many families forgo education, especially for girls, whose fathers surmise that girls can learn all the skills they will need for marriage in the home.

17. (C) Compared with 40 years ago, there are many more schools in southern Yemen, including institutions of higher learning. Many private universities in Sana'a have campuses in major southern cities and numerous private universities and colleges have been established in southern governorates. The number of educational opportunities, however, has not kept pace with the population explosion. The population in Aden in 1964 was roughly fourteen thousand. In 2001 it had reached five hundred and fifty thousand. National population estimates say these numbers will almost double by 2010.

18. (C) The quality of education has also suffered. Demand for qualified teachers has outstretched the available pool of applicants despite an influx of qualified migrants. Professor Abdullah al-Faqih, a professor at Sana'a University, points out that low teachers' salaries require many teachers to have second jobs. In addition, he said, political favoritism in staffing of government schools means jobs go to loyalists, who in many cases ignore their responsibilities. Al-Faqih complained about one professor who had a full time job as a member of the Supreme Council on Elections and Referenda to the detriment of his teaching.

19. (C) Comment: For southern Yemenis, the government's efforts to address educational opportunities are not apparent. The vast population boom and influx of northern Yemenis to the south means that, for the average southern

Yemeni, education is harder to come by than in the past. The quality of education has deteriorated considerably even since the doctrinal socialist period. Northern efforts to educate the youth of Yemen are not sufficient or heart-felt. In the absence of a transparent government budget process, Presidential decrees allocate resources to loyalists and influential people. End Comment.

Economic Opportunities

¶10. (U) In the 1950's and 1960's, economic activity in South Arabia was vibrant, though it tended to be concentrated in a few areas. One guidebook from 1964 illustrated this vibrancy with 105 full pages of advertisements for local businesses and services. These advertisements included household names for soft drinks, beer, cigarettes, and local cold storage, shops, and a number of banks, travel companies and trading companies. Mukallah according to "Economic and Social Statistics for 1948" rivaled Aden for economic activity. The British maintained a no tariff port in Aden and taxes were only imposed on alcohol, tobacco and petroleum products. Aden was one of the four busiest ports in the world for the trans-shipment of crates up through the mid-1960's. Imports into Aden in 1961 surpassed eighty thousand pounds sterling. On any given day, seventeen ships docked in Aden harbor and over five hundred deep-sea going ships called on the port per month. The colonial government reported oil was a growing industry. They also reported on fishing and local industry.

¶11. (U) The British maintained accurate records of deeds of ownership including, therefore, land. During the socialist era, businesses and land were nationalized and apportioned according to need by the government, which owned all means of production.

¶12. (C) Today economic opportunities are still abundant in southern Yemen. There are ventures in fisheries, honey production, liquefied natural gas, oil, mining (copper and stone), import and export and particularly tourism. Ten families dominate the economic scene, with the Hayl Saeed and Thabet families most active. These families work closely with the government providing social-service buildings, such as hospitals and hotels, where the government needs them in return for lucrative contracts. The Hayl Saeed businesses run training institutes and practice both local hiring and equal employment opportunities. Despite these families' efforts, Adeni unemployment runs at 20% according to a World Bank report from 2002. (Note: Nationwide unemployment is estimated to be currently 40%. End Note.) Many people remain untouched by economic development. After unification, the Saleh administration inherited southern government holdings,

including the majority of lands and businesses. SNACC member Saadaldeen Talib told PolOff that the Saleh administration still maintains ownership of much of this land, and apportions it out to northern loyalists, often with southerner tenants already in place. He added that many southerners do not own the homes they live in or the farms they tend. At a social event, PolOff asked an assembly of senior government and opposition figures if any of the beneficiaries of land and companies have invested in the properties they were given or tried to improve the standard of production from these holdings. The assembled Yemeni dignitaries replied that these beneficiaries had not, because since their wealth and future livelihood depended on their standing with Saleh, they had no incentive to do anything with their holdings.

¶13. (C) The ROYG promoted the Aden "Free Zone" on two visits by PolOff to the south. ROYG Free Zone authorities claimed the reason success has been just outside of reach is due to the lack of a 'flagship' international company. However, an Embassy contact and businessman in Aden told EmbOff that doing business in the Free Zone is more expensive than outside because of the level of graft demanded by authorities.

¶14. (C) Basha Bashraheel is editor of the independent

al-Ayaam newspaper and a member of an established Adeni family. (Note: Ali Mohammed Bashraheel was identified as editor and owner of "The Recorder," an English Language Weekly in Aden in 1954. Members of the Bashraheel family were in the Consultative Council during the British rule of Aden. End Note.) He told PolOff that the Saleh administration purposely closed Adeni businesses in favor of businesses in Sana'a. He also retold how northern forces following the 1994 civil war destroyed a state-of-the-art German built beer brewery in Aden when they occupied the city.

¶15. (C) Comment: While economic opportunities exist in southern Yemen, the richest Yemenis do not often take advantage, preferring to invest overseas. They are unsure of the security of economic investments in Yemen and flee the high cost of establishing a Yemeni business. Government corruption and meddling in economic affairs hampers the growth of entrepreneurs. The large oligarchic trading families have the money to succeed in Yemen's corrupt corridors of power, but prefer to amass wealth without shaking up the status quo or opening opportunities to new businesses. A diplomat with long experience in Yemen remarked to PolOff that these businessmen do not need to bribe customs officials because they are in favor with the President's inner circle. They are not advocates for a free market economy. Government mismanagement of land in southern Yemen further dampens economic activity and is the cause of much unrest and disaffection. End Comment.

Social Freedoms

¶16. (U) Social freedoms in British controlled South Arabia differed between Aden and the other regions. Eastern and western South Arabia were administered by local potentates until 1963, and social policies were influenced by the whims of these leaders, who might vacillate from religious to secular, open minded to xenophobic. In Aden, however, social freedoms abounded. Aden was a cosmopolitan city with a population in 1964 comprised of European (4,000 capita), Indian (16,000 capita), Somali (11,000 capita), Jewish (800 capita), Palestinian, Syrian, Lebanese and American (2,600 capita) communities. While a 1964 guidebook advised visiting women against wearing trousers, shorts or baring shoulders, it also discussed ripples of change in women's attitudes and rights. (Note: There were 250,000 visitors to Aden in ¶1964. End Note.) A group of young women, some of whom were educated in the West, mounted a protest with their families, approval and marched to various locations in Aden without the usual Arab tribal black head and body covering. (Note: Family support is accounted for, in that the young women were accompanied on their march by male relatives. Covering for women on the Arabian Peninsula can generally be divided into three levels. The 'abaya' is a long cloak that covers the shoulders, arms and legs. The 'hijab' is a covering over the head especially the hair. Lastly the 'nikab' is a covering for the face. A hijab can be worn without abaya or nikab, but an abaya is rarely worn without a hijab and the nikab wouldn't be worn without the hijab and abaya. End Note.) In 1964 women increasingly ventured out of doors in Western clothing with or without hijab. A picture of Aden's Woman's Society from 1963 shows a group of twenty young Adeni women in knee length skirts and without hijab, abaya or nikab.

¶17. (C) Elham Abdul-Wahab said that during the socialist regime in southern Yemen women were, along with Tunisians, in the forefront of the women's rights and gender equality movement in the Arab world. She continued to say that in

accordance with socialist teachings, women participated fully in society, were granted full participation in governing bodies and education, and did not cover. The family status law gave women the right to choose their marriage partner, and equal division of property after divorce or death. During both British rule and socialist rule, night clubs and alcohol were available as a personal choice. Intermingling of the sexes was commonplace. Public settings were not segregated. However, political expression was curtailed, according to Elham, one of whose brothers was killed in the

time of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen for his political views.

¶18. (C) In 2007, women in the South find their social freedoms increasingly reined in. The family status law was superseded in favor of more traditional northern tribal customs. Elham said women do not have any of the rights they had under the family status law. Adenis informed PolOff that following the unification and after the civil war, women were attacked and raped by security forces for not veiling with no repercussions for the attackers. Today women in Aden wear hijab, nikab and abaya. A BBC report on the status of women told the story of a middle aged Adeni woman who had always received the support of her family and ex-husband to be a career woman. The woman in the report said women today in Aden would find it hard to get that kind of support from their families. Women in Aden still have a higher level of literacy than in other parts of Yemen, a residual effect of British and socialist policies.

¶19. (C) Comment: Social freedoms have been seriously curtailed in southern Yemen. An influx of northerners, with poorer education and more traditional tribal views, have brought a conservative attitude to women's rights. Lack of educational and economic opportunities increasingly relegate women's roles to the home. End Comment.

Security

¶20. (C) British accounts of security in South Arabia reflect the independence movement and its choice to resort to violence to achieve its aims. Violent reaction to British attempts to create the Federation of South Arabia, in expectation of their eventual departure, further colored their perception of security. Tribesmen, unaccustomed to British rule of law, shot at British convoys and outposts in areas which were formerly controlled by tribes, sultans and emirs. Elham Abdul-Wahab said that the British provided rule of law and basic security despite the independence movement. Violence was not random and independence fighters targeted British military targets. She said women could in the 1960's go out at night alone, and return home after midnight without harassment and unharmed. Elham said that although her father and brothers were members of the independence movement the British colonial government allowed them to express their political views freely so long as they weren't caught in violent opposition. It was not until after independence that one of her brothers was killed for his political views.

¶21. (S) The Embassy has been tracking increased violence and protests in southern Yemen throughout 2007. Protesters report security forces have used increasing levels of indiscriminate harassment, pulling people out of buses whole-scale, firing on unarmed civilians, stranding them in the desert, and arresting opposition figures on trumped up charges and holding them indefinitely. In ref A, B, and C, post has reported on the violence in southern Yemen. Attacks on pipelines and ROYG reports of suspected al-Qaida activity point to terrorist activities in Abyan and Aden governorates. Demonstrations have occurred daily since September. Though protests receive only occasional media coverage, an Embassy contact and member of the Maritime Affairs Authority in Aden told EmbOff that on November 22, approximately 20,000 people protested in Yafa'a, Lahj. He said the government has already arrested twenty perceived trouble makers in Abyan on trumped up charges to keep them in detention until after the celebrations on November 30. (Note: The ROYG will be holding official celebrations on November 30 to mark the national holiday of southern Yemen Independence. End Note.) The Embassy contact said protests organizers plan to hold unofficial celebrations, for which they have not requested permits per government requirements (ref B and D). The Embassy contact said people are expected to converge on Aden.

¶22. (C) Comment: Embassy contacts in two recent conversations reported that southern discontent has reached a point of demanding a restoration of "southern pride." This

reaches beyond mediation over concrete issues. If "southern pride" is at stake, the ROYG has few options to address grievances. Demands for a redistribution of resources (especially oil, much of which flows through southern governorates and out ports in the South) will likely fall on deaf ears, because these resources help to prop up the Saleh

regime, paying off influential people in the administration. Land and employment, likewise, are not easily reapportioned to southerners. Attempts by protesters to be in Aden on November 30 will be countered by security forces who will block off the city, detain travelers and, as has happened in some recent protests, may resort to firing on crowds. President Saleh is presently in Aden and is expected to remain there until after the anniversary celebrations. His presence will ensure order, but it is increasingly unlikely he will be able to resolve southern discontent without reallocating resources away from his power base and influential groups who prop up the ROYG, a step which in turn may weaken or destabilize the regime.

123. (C) Comment continued: Southerners have real reason to be unhappy with how the ROYG is handling development and allocating national wealth. Nostalgia paints a much rosier picture of South Arabia or the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen than many admit, but lower population meant that sparse resources, jobs and educational opportunities could be divided to a greater degree. Northern leadership's reliance on traditional elements, including tribes, has lead to a deterioration of social freedoms, and have had a negative impact on the limited education available to southerners. Individually, southerners have a smaller piece of the pie, but the pie has grown. Though it may not avert continued conflict, the ROYG needs to improve efforts to fight corruption and to more equally divide the national wealth. Doing so may, in time, help economic prosperity grow, which will help address limited access to education, jobs, and influence the spread of social freedoms. End Comment.
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